A Newsletter for King County Metro Transit Employees

SNOW EXTRA



From the desk of the General Manager

Extra efforts appreciated!

Metro Transit just came through a period of adverse weather that was truly unique. Over a two-plus week period, four separate snowstorms hit the area, causing us to remain on high-alert status for an extended period of time. On the whole, we handled the challenge well, but we know that we can and will do better next time. This realization does not diminish the importance of actions above and beyond the call of duty by so many individual employees and work units. Your efforts were noticed, and this special "Snow Extra" edition of *In Transit* honors your professionalism and dedication to duty. I hope you will enjoy reading about just a few of the many super efforts that were put forth, and what some others had to say about them.

Many of you worked very hard and put in long hours under especially trying and unusual conditions. While we could not please everyone, the public definitely appreciated the hard work and dedication of front-line employees who were out battling the elements and doing their best to keep services operating and customers safe. Others acknowledged the valuable efforts of our Rider Information staff and Web services to keep them informed. Our customers and local officials realized the uniqueness and enormity of the situation and, given their overall response, we can be proud of our efforts. Their testimony is a credit to how you handled these adverse conditions.

With our Adverse Weather Plan in hand, we thought we were prepared. But on occasion, circumstances overwhelmed and frustrated us. We discovered that the pre-established snow plan did not envision a series of weather events of such duration and breadth. At times, we and our customers—both regular and new-found—were frustrated and not always happy...and we heard about it! Some things were beyond our control, but others, we believe, can be brought under our control in the future with better planning and execution.

There is always much to learn from an adverse weather challenge like the one we just experienced, and we are already moving in directions that will help us do better next time. I have convened groups of teams to assess our performance and address areas where we can improve. We have reached out to many of you already for input during this hard look at our performance, and we intend to obtain further feedback from operators as well. I appreciate the first-hand insights.

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In Transit online

Current and past issues of *In Transit* are available on the King County Web site at www.kingcounty.gov/transportation/kcdot/aboutus/intransit





Snow and ice made for slow going in downtown Seattle on Dec. 18.

Employees looked out for one another

On-the-job creativity and compassion for one's co-workers made a big difference during the relentless string of snow days and treacherous conditions in late December and early January. Here's a "tip of the hat" to a just a few of many Metro employees who pitched in to help their fellows:

- On Dec. 18, **Michael List** (supervisor, East Base) was spotted getting down, dirty, and all wet as he scraped snow and ice off base cars and put chains on them.
- **Don Goodwin** (chief, Component Supply Center) organized a much-appreciated chili feed (fondly referred to as the "chilly" feed) to help keep up morale at Vehicle Maintenance shops, where temperatures had plummeted and staff were working mandatory 10-hour shifts.
- When his Route 41 coach got stuck in snow near the Northgate Park-and-Ride, **Marc Nance** (operator, North Base) walked to a nearby Target store and bought two buckets of kitty litter, which he used to get his coach going. On later trips that same day, he used his litter to help free a Route 358 coach in downtown Seattle and a Route 65 coach in Lake City.

Keeping up with customer queries

When snow falls in the Seattle area, Metro's customer queries rise as riders and potential riders seek information about our services over the phone and online.

- Metro Online—Between Dec. 13 and Dec. 28, our Web site had over 1,005,000 hits, an average of almost 63,000 per day and nearly three times the 21,400 per-day average for the three days preceding the first predicted snowfall. On Dec. 22, our hits topped 151,000. Customer Information Technological and Resources Solutions (CITRS) staff were key to maintaining round-the-clock coverage of not only Metro Online, but all of Sales and Customer Services' automated customer information systems.
- Customer Information Office (CIO) staff were inundated by customer telephone calls. From Dec. 13 to Dec. 28, CIO operators answered 36,378 calls, an average of 2,274 per day—compared to 1,885 per day before the snow. Calls peaked on Dec. 22, with 2,973 calls answered by staff. Nearly two out of every three specialists worked overtime.
- Calls to RideshareOnline.com's ridematch phone number jumped to 153 percent of normal levels. Two Rideshare Operations employees, **Mika Imori** and **Julie Paone**, came in on vacation days to help staff the phone line and help ridematch customers, vanpools experiencing problems, and people who called to request bus information when other Metro phone

The snow hit just as a late delivery of January 2009 bus passes finally arrived. Dianna Sumabat of the Employer/Retail Products group in Sales and Customer Services stayed downtown for three days while the new passes were inventoried, packaged, and delivered, since traveling to and from her home in Lynnwood was too unpredictable. Co-workers Michelle Fujiwara, Martin Lee, Caleb Swift, and Jerry Waugh helped package and address products, arranged for special delivery and, in some cases, walked passes directly to downtown customer offices or to delivery services.

lines were busy.

Metro used nearly 4,000 sets of tire chains during the storm and its aftermath.



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General Manager

A formal after-action report, to be presented to Executive Ron Sims around Feb. 1, will focus on what happened before, during, and after the snowstorms and on lessons learned, and will identify and recommend improvements and resources needed in six key areas: snow removal and coordination with local jurisdictions; bus performance and availability; non-revenue vehicles; field conditions and internal communications; communications with the public; and service contingency planning.

I am told that we faced some of the most challenging operating and maintenance conditions and customer service demands that Metro has seen since the snowstorms of 1990 and 1996. Through it all, you performed like the professionals that you are, and I am confident we will make ourselves even prouder next time! Thank you.

- Kevin Desmond, General Manager

Praise from our customers

The following are excerpts from customer comments about our employees and services during the snow:

You did a great job under the incredibly unusual circumstances.

Despite the difficulty of providing service, you came through!

I've encountered cheerfulness, flexibility and competence from the drivers in what must be a stressful time to be driving.

I'm grateful for them going out and doing their job, so I can continue to get to mine.

Thank you also to the Metro staff who are keeping us all informed of various bus cancellations and reroutes.

It's really great to have a transportation company be so into helping passengers and caring about them.

Bus operators have been cheerfully informative and welcoming.

(My driver) did a remarkably good job getting downtown in some really hairy situations...and while under considerable stress he was a cool cucumber, patient with people who'd been waiting a long time for buses that never arrived. Huge kudos.

Keep up the great work!



Icy hills were just one of the challenges we faced while getting our customes to their destinations.

Communications Center provided vital links

Like so many other employees, communications coordinators worked long shifts, missed holiday events, spent nights at the control center, and somehow made the "unworkable" work.

Coordinators received more than 36,000 calls from operators from Dec. 15 to Dec. 28. Chiefs **David Magidman** and **Charlie Weeks** each worked 12-hour shifts for 10 days straight, and chief **Doug Beatty** cut short his vacation and returned to work a week early.

Many former coordinators, now assigned to other areas of Metro, voluntarily came into the Transit Control Center to help in any way they could. Staff members from Service Development, Rider Information, and other work groups also helped out.

VM profiled on-air by KUOW

As weather patterns and road conditions returned to normal, Vehicle Maintenance employees were still in the crunch, working to get damaged buses ready to go back on the road. KUOW reporter Ruby de Luna caught up with **Mike Eeds**, Vehicle Maintenance supervisor at South Base, for an interview on how mechanics were working to repair coaches damaged during the snowstorms.

"From the time it started snowing, my people have been working 10-12 hour days with no days off," Eeds said. "I have three shop trucks and a heavy duty wrecker that's been on the road basically 24 hours a day since the start of the snow schedule." The full interview is available in audio or transcript form on the KUOW Web site at www.kuow.org/program.php?id=16621.

Snow Fact:

Metro's Vehicle Maintenance employees responded to over 1200 calls for assistance to retrieve stranded coaches and repair tire chains over the two weeks between Dec. 13 and Dec. 26.

Safety came first

Transit Safety officers partnered with Operations Service Quality supervisors to help coach operators and passengers through the treacherous driving conditions. Safety officers helped transport operators back to their bases, helped drivers whose coaches became stuck in the snow and ice, aided in the removal of disabled coaches, and provided operators with comfort, encouragement, and procedural clarification.

In one dramatic incident, a coach spun out in the Richmond Beach area and slid over an embankment towards a residence. Safety officers **Scott Beasley**, **Darryl Russell**, and **Mike Wines** helped Vehicle Maintenance staff retrieve the coach.



A coach is "rescued" from a backyard in Richmond Beach.



Brrr! A Metro coach sports icicles.

Snow Fact:

Power and Facilities cleared Metro's seven Metro Operations and Maintenance Bases, nine Transit Centers, and all park-and-ride lots, as well as some streets, with four snowplows, four small sanders, and five small loaders that did double duty as snow removal equipment. Many walkways and loading areas were cleared manually by staff members using shovels and sand.

